Collaborative Project Management

Unleashing the Potential of Cross-Functional Teams

Problems Facing Cross-Functional Teams

- Technical Complexity
- Social Complexity
- Wicked Problems

Technical Complexity

- Increasingly complicated technical problems
- Increasingly complicated technical solutions

Social Complexity

- Variety of means and channels of communication
- Distributed decision making
- Increasingly complex social and legal environment
- Dwindling budgets
- Outsourcing involves multiple organizations
- Team members may answer to multiple constituencies
- Diverse backgrounds and perspectives

Wicked Problems

1. You don't understand the problem until you have developed a solution.

2. Wicked problems have no stopping rule.

3. Solutions to wicked problems are not right or wrong.

4. Every wicked problem is essentially unique and novel.

5. Every solution to a wicked problem is a "one-shot operation."

6. Wicked problems have no given alternative solutions.
   (Source: Horst Rittel)

Examples of Wicked Problems

- Global warming
- Improving public education
- The war on drugs
- AIDS
- Designing a launch vehicle

Human Problem Solving

1. Human problem solving is a non-linear process.

2. Linear problem solving models rely on the ability to fully formulate the problem in advance of knowing the solution.

3. People opportunistically move back and forth between understanding the problem and formulating the solution.

4. The more complex the problem, the greater the tension will be between natural, non-linear problem solving and organized, linear problem solving.
(Source: Microelectronics and Computer Technology Corporation (MCC))

Artificially Simplifying Wicked Problems

1. Lock down the problem definition.

2. Assert that the problem is solved.

3. Specify objective parameters by which to measure the solution's success.

4. Cast the problem as "just like" a previous problem that has been solved.

5. Give up on trying to get a good solution to the problem.

6. Declare that there are just a few possible solutions, and focus on selecting from among these options.

The Problem with Wicked Problems

Because wicked problems defy traditional methods, solving them is primarily a social activity.

(Jeff Conklin, Ph.D., CogNexus Institute)

The Result

Technical complexity, social complexity, and wicked problems create fragmentation in teams.

The Result

- 30% of IT-enabled projects never come to a fruitful conclusion (Gartner Group).

- 70% of Business Process Redesign (BPR) projects fail (Malhotra).

- 74% of U.S. workers over the age of 18 are not engaged in their work (Gallup).

What Is Collaboration?

Collaboration is a system for leading, managing and working; it is built on the principles of ownership and alignment.

Key Ideas Underlying Collaboration

- **Ownership** – The degree to which people believe or feel that a process, decision, or outcome is theirs.

- **Alignment** – The degree to which people are prepared to operate in the same way and/or toward the same end.

- **Real Work in Real Time** – Collaborative tools and techniques are best learned while engaged in actual work projects.

- **Groups can Produce Better Solutions than Individuals** – A group has the ability to make better decisions and solve complex problems more effectively than an individual.

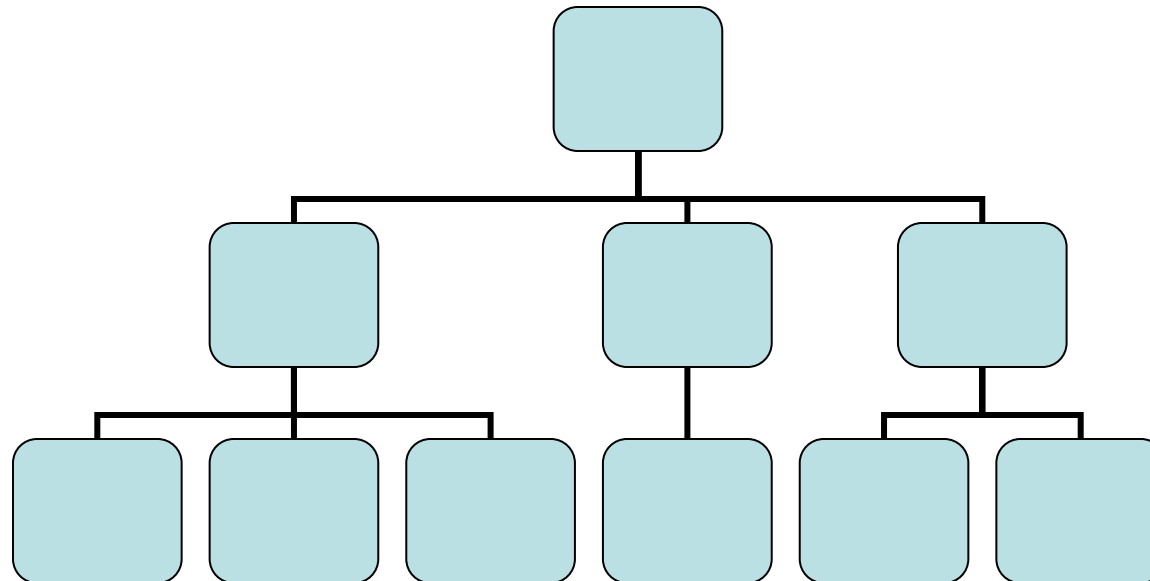# What Does Collaboration Look Like?

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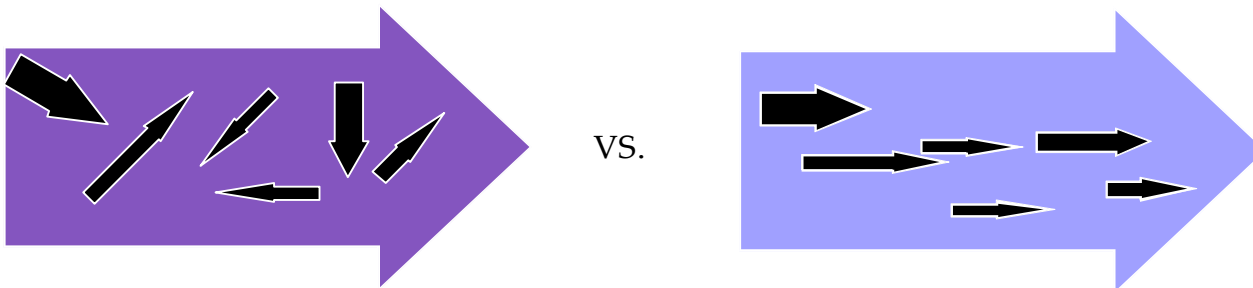
Features of Working Hierarchically

- People aren't invested in decisions they didn't make

- Doing things they don't agree with saps their motivation

- Hierarchy naturally creates disengagement

A Hierarchical Organization

Features of Working Hierarchically

1. Decisions take less time and involve fewer people

2. Implementation takes more time

3. Lower quality decisions and work product

4. Quality of work relationships varies

5. Level of satisfaction with the work varies

6. Generally lower individual investment in work and the company

A Collaborative Organization

Features of Working Collaboratively
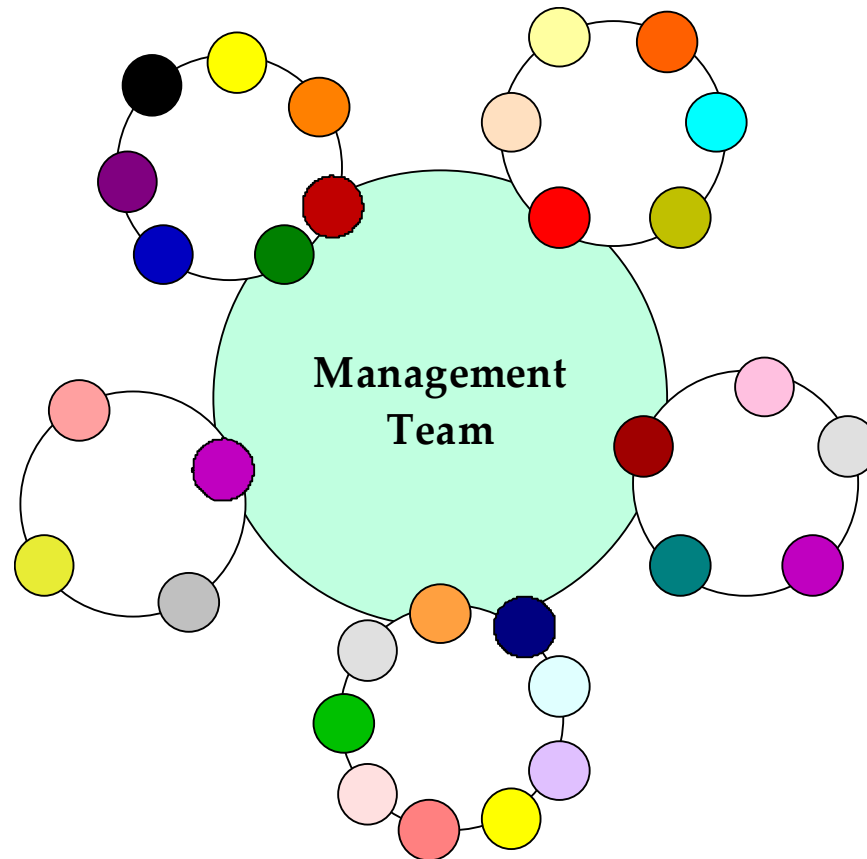
1. Decisions take longer and involve more people

2. Implementation takes less time

3. Higher quality decisions and work product

4. Better work relationships

5. Higher level of satisfaction with the work

6. Greater individual investment in work and the company

The Four Elements of Collaboration

1. Involve Relevant Stakeholders

2. Form the Team

3. Create a Collaborative Plan

4. Meet Collaboratively

Key Collaborative Concepts

- **Relevant Stakeholders**

- **Content and Process**

- **Operating Agreements**

- **Future State and Current State**

Key Collaborative Concepts:
Relevant Stakeholders

- A **stakeholder** is *anyone with an interest in a situation or decision.*

- **Relevant Stakeholders** must be included in some way in order for a decision to be collaborative. Excluding relevant stakeholders reduces ownership and alignment.

Types of Relevant Stakeholders

1. **Those with the formal power to make a decision:** *People who are authorized to make a final and binding decision.*

2. **Those with the power to block a decision:** *People who can block or severely delay the implementation of a decision.*

3. **Those affected by a decision:** *Although this is usually the largest group, often there are subsets of people who will be more affected and concerned than others.*

4. **Those with relevant information or expertise:** *If the inclusion of people from the first three categories does not provide sufficient expertise to make informed decisions, then it may be necessary to bring in outside experts.*

Key Collaborative Concepts:
Content and Process

- **Content** is the "what," for example, a thing being manufactured.

- **Process** is the "how," for example, the manufacturing process.

  Content and Process are important because the team must have ownership of and alignment around both in order to work collaboratively. That is, the team must be in agreement on *what* they are doing and *how* they are doing it at all times.

Key Collaborative Concepts:
Operating Agreements

- In order to function without a single hierarchical leader, a team must decide how it will operate.

- The team collaboratively creates a set of operating agreements for itself.

- Operating agreements form the basis which allows the team to function smoothly and to grow in effectiveness and trust.

Key Collaborative Concepts:
Operating Agreements

1. Communication Agreement

2. Conflict Resolution Agreement

3. Decision Making Agreement

4. Attendance Agreement

5. Confidentiality Agreement

6. Feedback Agreement

7. Amendments to Agreements

Key Collaborative Concepts:
Current State/Future State

In order to create a collaborative plan, a team needs:

- Ownership and alignment around the current state

- Ownership and alignment around the future state

- Ownership and alignment around the plan to get from the current state to the future state

Change Plan

| Current State | → | Future State |
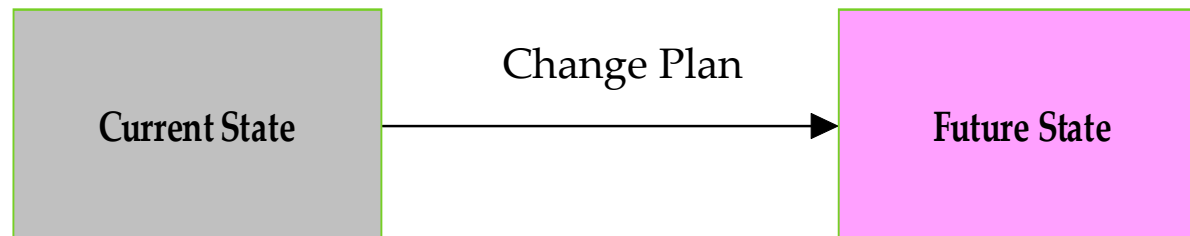
Collaboration

- Is the only system capable of dealing with the combination of technical complexity, social complexity, and wicked problems.

- Creates higher engagement and commitment among team members.

- Improves inter- and intra-team communication.

- Creates better solutions than traditional methods.